

Message Text

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17

ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 PM-03 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 CIAE-00

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FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5132

INFO AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY LISBON

AMCONSUL SURABAYA

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE CANBERRA 1212

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, PO AS

SUBJECT: AUSTRALIAN PRESS REPORTS ON INDONESIAN
INTENTIONS REGARDING PORTUGUESE TIMOR

REF: CANBERRA 1158 (NOTAL)

1. AUSTRALIAN PRESS CONTINUES TO CARRY NUMEROUS
ARTICLES, OFTEN WITH HIGH SPECULATIVE CONTENT, REGARDING
REPORTED INDONESIAN INTENTIONS TO INCORPORATE
PORTUGUESE TIMOR BY FORCE. MOST PRESTIGIOUS
AUSTRALIAN DAILY, MELBOURNE AGE, CARRIES FRONT PAGE
HEADLINE FEB 25, QTE TIMOR INVASION FEARS GROW;
COMMUNIST COUP IN MAKING, INDONESIA ALLEGES END QTE.
AGE HAD CARRIED EDITORIAL FEB 24 SHARPLY CRITICAL
OF ALLEGED INDONESIAN INTENTIONS, COMMENTING THAT
QTE TIMOR TAKEOVER NOT THE ANSWER. END QTE OTHER
PRESS ARTICLES IN SAME VEIN.

2. AGE ARTICLE FEB 25 QUOTES OPPOSITION SPOKESMAN
FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS, ANDREW PEACOCK, AS STATING
THAT GOA MUST MAKE AN UNEQUIVOCAL STATEMENT SUPPORTING
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COMPLETE FREEDOM OF CHOICE FOR PEOPLE OF TIMOR.

FAILURE TO TAKE THIS STEP, ACCORDING TO PEACOCK, WOULD QUICKLY CREATE SUBSTANTIAL PROBLEMS FOR AUSTRALIA, PAPUA NEW GUINEA, AND OTHER COUNTRIES IN REGION.

3. EMBOFF INQUIRED OF DFA PRESS SPOKESMAN FEB 25 WHETHER ARTICLES REFLECTED OFFICIAL BACKGROUNDING OF AUSTRALIAN PRESS. SPOKESMAN (IAN NICHOLSON, ASSISTANT SECRETARY, INFORMATION BRANCH, DFA) ACKNOWLEDGED THAT DFA UNDER HEAVY PRESSURE FROM AUSTRALIAN PRESS, BUT HE ATTRIBUTED BULK OF STORIES TO OTHER DEPARTMENTS OF AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT, JAKARTA PRESS REPORTS, AND VIVID IMAGINATION. HE NOTED THAT PETER HASTINGS ARTICLE IN SYDEY MORNING HERALD FEB 21 (TEXT IN REFTEL) REFLECTED HASTINGS' GOOD SOURCES ON INDONESIA BUT ALSO NOTED THAT HASTINGS VISITED JAKARTA ABOUT ONE MONTH AGO.

4. COMMENT: BELIEVE THERE WILL BE ADDITIONAL PRESS AND, PROBABLY, PARLIAMENTARY ATTENTION TO REPORTS THAT INDONESIA WILL USE FORCE IN PORTUGUESE TIMOR. REGARDING STATEMENT BY ANDREW PEACOCK ABOVE, PEACOCK IS CLOSE PERSONAL FRIEND OF OPPOSITION SPOKESMAN FOR SOCIAL SECURITY, DON CHIPP, WHO HAS NEAR FIXATION ON ISSUE OF INDONESIAN POLITICAL DETAINEES. CHIPP IS CHARPLY CRITICAL OF INDONESIAN GOVERNMENT ON RANGE OF ISSUES, AND HAS PROBABLY PRESSED PEACOCK TO MAKE KNOWN CONCERN WIDELY FELT IN AUSTRALIA REGARDING REPORTS OF INDONESIAN USE OF FORCE.
HARROP

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